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Troll Patrol

Mel Gilden

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Chapter One

A Thing that Goes Bump in the Night

Danny Keegan stared out the window of the big yellow school bus, frowning. Danny should have been happy to be on that bus, rolling through the wilds of Long Island, but he was not.

He and his friends were on their way to Camp Horrorific. They were all going to learn how to be monsters.

Stevie Brickwald, the fifth grade bully, had once tried to become a vampire, and that had not worked out very well for him. Stevie's problem was that he thought putting on a tuxedo and slicking back his hair would make him a real vampire. Danny and most of the kids on the bus knew that a few weeks at Camp Horrorific would no more make them real monsters than a few weeks at some other camp would make them American Indians.

Danny was unhappy because sitting next to him

was his sister Barbara. She was only in the fourth grade, and from Danny's fifth grade perspective, she was still just a kid. Their parents had ordered him to watch out for her and he was doing his best, but as the bus bumped along and the other kids shouted at each other, Danny considered strangling her.

Open on her knees was her *Girls' Pathfinders Handbook*. She referred to the pictures of trees in the handbook and pointed out the window. "There's an oak tree," she said. "And another oak tree. And that looks like a dogwood. And another oak tree."

This had been going on for hours.

Danny tried again to shut her up. He said, "Look, Barb, I'm as interested in nature as the next guy, but I know an oak tree when I see one, OK?"

"Not all of them are oak trees, silly," Barbara said. "That one's a maple." Excitedly, she said, "There's a squirrel."

As far as Danny was concerned, the presence of a squirrel was also not news.

Most of the kids on the bus went to P.S. 13 during the school year, but a few of them were strangers. As far as Danny could tell, none of them were monsters.

Danny was a monster expert because his best friends were distant relatives of some of the world's most famous monsters. The really great part about Camp Horrorific was that most of Danny's monster friends were going to be counselors. They'd gone to Camp Horrorific a couple of days earlier for training, and Danny couldn't wait to see them.

Only Howie Wolfner wouldn't be with them. He was a werewolf kid, and he was spending most of the summer with his parents at a werewolf conven-

tion. When Howie told him about the convention, Danny was shocked that there were enough werewolves in the New York City area to have a convention. Howie was a great guy and Danny would miss him.

Ryan Webler turned around in his seat and said, "I finished my article about Camp Horrorific for the school paper. Want to read it?"

"You can write on a moving bus?" Danny said.

"Look at the blackcap chickadees!" Barbara cried.

Ryan ignored Barbara. He'd also been listening to her nature reports for hours. He said, "A journalist has to be able to write anywhere." He handed Danny his laptop computer and said, "Just push the page button when you want to see more."

Ryan was a good writer, but Danny already knew most of what was in the article because he'd been at the Horrorifics meeting when J. Manley Forest, the president of the Horrorifics, had come up with the idea of a summer camp for monsters. Danny remembered that spring had been in the air, and the sun did not go down till after seven. Mr. Keegan took Danny, Ryan, and Howie to the Horrorifics meeting where the main event was to be a screening of an old horror movie called *If It Howls like a Wolf.*

"You really want to see this movie, Howie?" Danny asked while he and Howie and Ryan waited for Mr. Keegan to find his car keys. Generally, Danny's monster friends did not like old monster movies because the movies helped give monsters a bad name.

"They do not promote understanding," Elisa Stein had said. Elisa and her brother, Frankie, were the tallest kids in the fifth grade. They also had bolts in

their necks, and perhaps had not been born in the usual sense of the word. Danny did not ask too many questions and his friends did not volunteer information.

"Absolutely, old chum," Howie said. He always talked like that because he was from England. "I have heard that in this film the werewolf is the hero."

"That's what I always liked about it," Mr. Keegan said as he walked up, dangling his car keys from one hand.

"Where did you find them, sir?" Ryan said. He liked to get the facts.

"Between the salt and pepper shakers on the kitchen table. I must have walked past them a million times. Come on, boys," Mr. Keegan said. "Head 'em up! Move 'em out!"

When they walked into the park bungalow where the Horrorifics meeting was being held, the guy at the door gave each of them a photocopy of an article about *If It Howls like a Wolf* that had appeared in *Marvelous Movie Monsters* magazine some years before. J. Manley Forest was the founding editor and publisher of M & M & M, as he sometimes called it, so this was no surprise. Mr. Forest was also a big noise in the Horrorifics.

Before the movie, the members took care of some old business—namely how to raise money for a new videotape player. Some members didn't want a videotape player at all. "Tape is for wimps," a big guy with a beard shouted.

"Yeah," said his enormous friend. "A movie isn't a movie unless it's on film."

"Get real," somebody shouted.

"Is that spelled r-e-e-l?" somebody else shouted.

And the Horrorifics were off on one of their famous pun-filled arguments.

Howie politely raised his hand but everybody ignored him. When he got tired of waiting, he threw back his head and howled. Danny had heard Howie howl louder and more fiercely, but even one of Howie's pipsqueek howls was magnificent enough to make Danny feel uneasy. Howie had to howl only once to get everybody's attention.

In the suddenly quiet room, Howie said, "Summer is coming. Perhaps the Horrorifics could raise money by running a summer camp for chaps who are interested in promoting monster goodwill."

"Ya know," said Mr. Forest, "that might be a good idea. I own a piece of property out near Under Wood on Long Island that might be just right for a thing like that."

As usual, some members of the Horrorifics disagreed. But as the talk continued, Mr. Forest swayed more people to his side. In ten or fifteen minutes, he had convinced almost everyone not only that the club could make a lot of money with a summer camp, but also that the original idea for a summer camp had been his.

Howie did not seem to mind. "As long as someone does it," he said.

After that, the bearded guy and his enormous friend set up a sixteen-millimeter movie projector and started the movie. It was actually pretty good, and Danny was pleasantly frightened more than once. A few times, Howie laughed when nobody else did.

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When the movie was over, Howie sighed and said, "It's bully to see the werewolf win for a change."

"Can I quote you on that?" Ryan said. His pencil was poised over his notebook.

Howie shrugged. "Why not?" he said.

Danny handed the laptop computer back to Ryan and said, "That's the way it happened all right, but Mr. Forest might disagree. He thinks he came up with the monster camp idea."

"He can write a letter to the editor," said Ryan. "Who also happens to be me."

"Look," said Barbara excitedly.

"Another oak tree?" Danny asked without looking.

"No. It's a building!"

The bus drove into a clearing where a small group of rugged one-story buildings stood, all of them made from rough unfinished wood planks.

Along with the others, Danny grabbed his suitcase and his official Camp Horrorific jacket and piled off the bus. He was glad they'd arrived at last, not only because he was eager to start his summer, but also because it meant that Barbara would probably stop itemizing the forest.

The air was much cooler than the air in Brooklyn. It smelled better too, like fresh green leaves and clean dirt—not a surprise considering what was all around them. The kids stood in a clump surrounded by their baggage, looking like refugees.

Waiting for the new campers was Mr. Forest and his staff. Mr. Forest and his second-in-command, Arthur Debarber, wore gray leisure suits, each with a Camp Horrorific patch on the left pocket. Mr.

Debarber carried a clipboard. Once, Arthur Debarber had almost succeeded sending all the monsters in Brooklyn back where they'd come from. But with the help of J. Manley Forest, Danny and his friends had been able to stop him and convince him that monsters were just people, if a little special.

Four of the most special people Danny knew were standing near Mr. Forest and Mr. Debarber.

Frankie and Elisa Stein were smiling, but calmly. Even under pressure they were calm, which was one of the things Danny liked about them.

C. D. Bitesky was a small kid who always wore a tuxedo. Two small fangs showed when he smiled and he lived on Fluid of Life, which he sucked with a straw from a Thermos that he carried in the pocket of his cape. His winter tux was black, and his summer tux was white. But for this occasion, he wore a pine green tuxedo, making him look a little like a soldier in *The Wizard of Oz*. He bowed at each new kid as he or she jumped off the bus.

Gilly Finn spread her arms and sang, "Summertime, and the livin' is easy . . ." but that was fairly normal for her. She liked to sing and would do it with the least excuse. Sometimes her songs had a strange effect on water. She had long blonde hair held back by seashell barrettes. The colors she wore were the blue, green, and gray of the sea. In the right light, Danny could almost see the faintly greenish scales on her skin and the delicate fins at her wrists and ankles.

A woman ran from one of the buildings. She was round and wore loose colorful clothes that did not

match. A bright yellow scarf was wrapped around her head and a gold hoop dangled from one ear.

Danny and Ryan waved as they called out, "Zelda Bella!" Zelda Bella was the host on *Mother Scary's Matinee,* the weekly monster movie show on TV. She may also have been a witch. More than once, she had helped Danny and his friends solve a problem that no other adult even understood.

She waved a big silver spoon at them, flinging bits of chocolaty-looking stuff all over the place. She skidded up next to Gilly and they continued the song as a duet.

Near Mr. Forest and Mr. Debarber stood a couple of big muscular guys wearing bathing suits and leather straps across their chests. They both had beards and curly hair, though the hair of one of them was going a little gray. The older of the two was Ulysses; the younger was Jason. They were friends of Gilly Finn's who ran the Trojan Horse Army and Navy Surplus back on Creeps Head Bay. They looked friendly enough, but very dignified and heroic. Danny felt heroic himself, just looking at them.

When Gilly and Zelda Bella finished singing, Mr. Forest welcomed everyone to Camp Horrorific and said that he was sure a good time would be had by all. He then had Mr. Debarber tell the campers who their counselors would be.

Barbara was delighted to be assigned to Elisa's Frankenstein Monster Girls cabin. They were best friends, and Barbara probably would have made quite a fuss if she'd be assigned to anybody else. Ryan and three other boys went off with Frankie to be Frankenstein Monster Boys. Gilly marched her Mer-

maid girls off singing, "I am a happy wanderer . . ." Danny was in C. D.'s Vampire cabin.

As they walked up the slope to the cabins, Danny inhaled the cool crisp air and said to C. D., "This is great."

"Perhaps," C. D. said.

"What's wrong?"

"Perhaps nothing," C. D. said. "Perhaps much. I hear strange sounds in the night. In the morning, things are found not where they were left the day before."

"You're just not used to living in the wilderness," Danny said. "It's probably just animals. Raccoons and squirrels and stuff."

"Perhaps," C. D. said again, and shook his head.

Danny had come to Camp Horrorific to have some fun after a long tough year in the fifth grade. But it looked as if something might be wrong here. He thought briefly of getting back on the bus and returning to Brooklyn. It would be the easy thing to do but it wouldn't be the monster way. He only hoped that the problem, if there was one, would be more entertaining than dangerous. He hurried to keep up with C. D. and the other boys in his cabin.

Danny had a wonderful day. He got to know Jack, Joe, and Harold, the other guys in his cabin, while they strolled around Camp Horrorific with C. D. They played a little baseball and some horseshoes. Still ahead were swimming and nature hikes and monster crafts. And maybe an adventure. Maybe not. Danny remained hopeful.

One of the campers was shorter than all the others,

even shorter than C. D. He didn't say much, and he just kind of skulked around, but he was one terrific horseshoe player. Danny got a good look at him while they were collecting their horseshoes. The kid wore brown clothing and a wide leather belt with three hooks to hold it closed. Stranger yet, he seemed to need a shave.

Attempting to make conversation with the strange kid, Danny said, "So, uh, what school do you go to?"

"Hard knocks," the kid said in a gravelly voice. Maybe the poor guy had some kind of throat problem in addition to being stunted. He handed Danny the horseshoes and walked away quickly.

In the daylight, Danny could almost forget C. D.'s talk about strange sounds and movements in the night. But as the sun went down and the wind whipped up, he began to get a little uneasy. Feeling the need to talk to a sympathetic adult, Danny went to the kitchen and stood in the warm doorway while Zelda Bella bustled around the big industrial kitchen getting dinner. Whatever she was making smelled wonderful. He asked her what she thought of C. D.'s vague suspicions.

Zelda Bella stopped stirring the soup and rested her hand on the big silver spoon, which she stood on its tip. She looked out the window at the darkening forest and said, "It's true. They tell strange stories about Under Wood."

"They who?"

"They," Zelda Bella said. "The ones who tell the stories. Things go bump in the night."

"That's what C. D. said. What sorts of things?"

"I don't know, Danny. I'm sorry, but I'm feeding a lot of people tonight, so I'd better get back to work." She began to stir the soup again.

"Can I ask you one more question? It's not about Under Wood."

"Fire away, kid."

"Why are you here?"

"Not glad to see me?"

With a shock of embarrassment, Danny said, "Of course I am, I just wondered—"

Zelda Bella smiled. "You want to know why I'm not back in Brooklyn doing the Mother Scary show?"

Danny nodded.

Zelda Bella said, "We're on hiatus. That's the show biz word for vacation. They'll be running Mother Scary reruns all summer. I thought I'd get away and pick up a little extra cash at the same time. Besides, I like to cook."

Danny could see why. Zelda Bella made wonderful food. The soup she'd been cooking was called goulash. When it was time for dinner, kids picked up big bowls of it in the mess line and went to sit down.

"Weird food," said Jack, who was sitting across the table from Danny with Harold. Each cabin had its own table in the mess hall. Jack picked up some goulash with his spoon and let it splash back into the bowl.

"Good food," said C. D. and took a sip from his Thermos. "Like in the Old Country."

Reasonably enough, Jack said, "Then why aren't you eating it?"

"I have special needs," C. D. said and smiled, showing his fangs.

Like most of the other campers, Danny tasted the goulash and thought it was delicious. Goulash was a spiced vegetable and meat soup. It made the stuff that came from a can seem kind of drab. The brownies Zelda Bella made for dessert were instantly recognizable and they were as wonderful as the goulash.

When they were done eating, Mr. Forest got up and said a few words about the camp and what a swell time they'd all have. He introduced Ulysses and Jason and told everybody that the two of them would be teaching boating the next day, if anybody was interested. A lot of campers cheered. Mr. Forest sent everybody to bed.

It was awfully early, but Danny realized that he was very tired. He'd had a long active day in a new place and the next day he'd be up early. Getting some rest sounded like a good idea.

Once at Vampire cabin, C. D. smoothed out some dirt on his bed. "My native soil," he explained.

Harold said, "So are you a real vampire or what?"

There was a nervous silence during which C. D. sucked on his Fluid of Life and glanced at Danny.

"He puts on a good show, doesn't he?" Danny said.

"If that's what it is," Harold said.

"Your blood is safe," C. D. said.

Harold grumbled some more, but soon was making up his own bed the way he liked it.

The five boys lay down in the dark and laughed and talked and told terrible jokes. The spaces between bits of conversation got longer and longer and soon Danny heard nothing but the wind in the trees—

mostly oaks—and the singing of crickets. He drifted to sleep.

Later he awoke with an urgent need to go to the bathroom. If he'd been at home he would have just walked down the hall, but at Camp Horrorific the bathrooms were in a separate building on the other side of open ground.

So Danny just lay there for a while listening to the placid breathing of the other boys. He thought about what C. D. had said and about the strange kid. Were they connected? Danny had no idea, but the possibility worried him.

What he hoped was an owl hooted nearby and something scurried in the underbrush right below his window. At home, Danny had slept through police sirens and heavy street construction, but these tiny noises were unfamiliar and so they kept him awake. And he had to go to the bathroom worse than ever.

He silently threw back the covers, put on his bathrobe against the cold, and put his running shoes on his bare feet, where they felt damp and sticky. After finding his flashlight where he'd left it next to his bed, he tiptoed across the floor and slowly opened the door. It squeaked badly but nobody awoke.

Outside it was much brighter than inside the cabin and he didn't need the flashlight. Trees were tall silent ghosts, and the world smelled of maple syrup. Confidently, Danny walked across the dirt and pine needles to the bathroom cabin. When sometime later he started back, he felt as if he'd had a successful adventure. Going to the bathroom like this took some extra trouble, but it was part of the Camp Horrorific experience.

He stopped outside Vampire cabin to take a deep breath and look around and listen to the soft forest noises. He heard a bump. A bump in the night. And it had come from inside the cabin.

Chapter Two

Andahseven, the Swedish Kid

Danny's first impulse was to run. But run where? To whom? And how silly would he feel if, when he returned, whatever it was was gone? Worse yet, what if the thing did something awful to the guys inside the cabin because he'd been too afraid to go in and surprise it?

His heart pounding like mad, suddenly cold and sweaty, Danny lifted the latch on the door and pushed it open a little with one finger, keeping well back from the doorway. He aimed the flashlight into the cabin and called, "Come out with your hands up!"

A moment later, something knocked Danny down. He grabbed hold of a leg and held on tight despite the energetic kicking.

"What's going on?" C. D. cried, and then Danny and whatever he'd caught were surrounded by the boys of Vampire cabin.

A lot of flashlights were pointed down to where Danny and the other were sprawled on the ground.

The other turned out to be the strange short kid who needed a shave.

"Leave me go," cried the kid. "Leave me go."

"What were you doing in our cabin?" Danny said, sounding braver than he felt.

In the flashlight beams, the kid looked unaccountably terrified. What did he think, that the five of them would hurt him? The kid said, "I wasn't in the cabin. You had a dream."

"I caught you coming out," Danny said.

"Oh. Yeah. I was looking for my cabin. I went into yours by mistake."

"In which cabin do you belong?" C. D. said.

"Which?" the kid said.

"What's your name?" Joe asked.

"My name? It's Andahseven."

"Sounds Swedish," Jack said.

"Swedish cabin," Andahseven said.

"No such thing," Danny said.

"Leave me go," Andahseven said, and gave a mighty kick. Danny lost his grip, and Andahseven was on his feet and lost in the darkness before any of the boys could do anything.

"For a short kid, he moves pretty fast," Harold said.

Danny shined his light into the cabin and said, "What was he doing in there?"

They went inside and switched on the single bare electric bulb in the ceiling. In the stark light the cabin looked cold and bleak. Each of the boys checked his property and found nothing out of place.

"Maybe he really was just lost," Jack said.

"Swedish cabin?" Danny said.

C. D. suggested that they all go back to sleep. "No doubt we will understand better in the morning."

Danny did not think so, and the other boys seemed even less inclined to agree with C. D., but Danny said, "In the morning we'll talk to Mr. Forest."

The boys went to bed and C. D. turned out the light, but Danny could not sleep, thinking about Andahseven. From the sounds of tossing and turning coming from the other beds, Danny was not alone.

Early—too early, Danny thought—the next morning, reveille blared from loudspeakers on tall posts. Feeling as if he were made of wood, Danny crawled from his bed and quickly dressed, shivering all the while. Shivering boys danced around him on the cold floor while they piled on the clothing. Danny himself put on two flannel shirts and a sweater and his official Camp Horrorific jacket. C. D. assured everyone that it would be warmer later.

Zelda Bella served pancakes and sausage for breakfast and by the time the campers were finished, they had to return to their cabins to take off most of the clothing they'd put on less than an hour before.

The boys in Vampire cabin horsed around as they got into their bathing suits and found their towels. Danny thought occasionally about Andahseven, but in the bright warm sunshine, the events of the previous night seemed to be ancient history.

As they walked down a wide dirt path to Gojumpintheh Lake, Danny saw Andahseven skulking around the edge of the crowd of campers and all the fears of the night before came back to him. He dropped back

to find Mr. Forest, who was strolling toward the lake with Mr. Debarber.

"Having a good time, son?" Mr. Forest said to him.

"Yes, sir, but—"

"Fine. Fine."

"But I have a question."

Mr. Forest nodded as if he'd expect that and said, "I can answer any question."

"He's not always right," Mr. Debarber said, "but he always has an answer."

The two men laughed at that and Danny said, "I have a question about a camper named Andahseven."

"Andahseven?" Mr. Debarber said as he checked his clipboard. "Sounds Swedish."

"Maybe. He's a little guy who looks as if he needs a shave."

"Oh," said Mr. Forest as if this explanation answered many questions.

Mr. Debarber said, "He's not on my list. What's his last name?"

"I don't know. I just sort of saw him around."

"If you see him again," Mr. Forest said, "have him report to one of us. Can't have spare boys running all over the place."

Danny walked a little faster and left Mr. Forest and Mr. Debarber behind. As he approached Gojumpintheh Lake he gathered Ryan and his monster friends. Barbara tagged along with Elisa.

Danny said, "I talked to J. Manley Forest and Arthur Debarber."

"The dude and the sub-dude," Gilly said and laughed.

C. D. said, "What did you learn, Danny?"

"They never heard of a camper named Andahseven."

"Is this some kind of Swedish code?" Barbara said.

"If it is," Elisa said, "I also do not understand."

At C. D.'s urging, Danny explained what had happened in Vampire cabin the night before. Then C. D. repeated, "Things go bump in the night. Also, they are moved."

Gilly said, " 'From ghoulies and ghosties and long-legged beasties and things that go bump in the night, Good Lord, deliver us!' "

"Yeah," said Danny, "and from Andahseven too, whoever he is."

"Are you scared, Danny?" Barbara said.

"Not yet," said Danny, "but I could be persuaded."

They walked for a while in silence and then Frankie said, "If this Andahseven will not speak to us we must gather facts another way. Keep careful watch."

Danny agreed that until something actually happened, it was all they could do.

The campers gathered on the dock while making admiring comments about the big boat tied up there. Danny had ridden in it before and he knew it was a galley, a kind of ancient Greek boat. It had an orange sail and room for many rowers. A large oar used as a rudder was attached to the side. Eyes were painted on the bow.

Ulysses and Jason were standing on the high deck at the back of the galley looking very heroic and windblown, indeed. Ulysses called down, "Greet-

ings, campers! Come aboard! Come aboard!'' Jason pushed the end of a wide plank onto the dock and the campers streamed into the galley.

Danny watched carefully as Andahseven hid himself in the thickest bunch of campers and stayed among them. Evidently the other kids thought he was a little weird looking because they kept their distance. Still, other than the fact that he'd come there at all, he did nothing suspicious.

J. Manley Forest and Arthur Debarber waved as Ulysses and Jason used long poles to push the galley away from the dock.

When they were well away, Ulysses steered while Jason opened a bag—one of four on deck—and released a small whirlwind. Kids scattered as it raced among them like a puppy crazy with love. ''Here now, Baskerville. Here now,'' Jason called. The whirlwind leaped up into the sail and pushed the galley smoothly across the water.

''Way cool,'' said Barbara, who had never before seen Jason or Ulysses release one of their breezes. Many of the campers agreed with her.

Wind blew into Danny's face, mussing his hair and bringing fresh country smells. He almost believed himself to be a hero. From out on the water, the lake looked as if it were surrounded by a solid wall of trees.

Jason then told the kids about the different parts of the galley and what they were called. ''Here me, O campers,'' Jason cried. ''Mark me well. To be good sailors, you must be most nautical. The front of the galley is the bow. The back is the stern. The right side as you face front is starboard. The left side as

you face front is port. Ulysses is standing on the poop deck piloting with a rudder.''

Jack said, ''Who pooped on the poop deck?'' and laughed. Other campers started to laugh with him, but Jason's angry glance stopped them.

''Where away, Jason?'' Ulysses cried.

''We will circumnavigate the lake,'' Jason hollered back. He raised a fist and the campers cheered.

After that, Jason had each camper take an oar, and he showed them how to row. Even Andahseven had an oar to himself. He was small, but he was muscular. Danny decided he would be a good rower. When they were all set, Jason called Baskerville back to his bag and the sail went limp.

''Now, campers! For the glory of Ithaca and Iolcus, row!''

Despite Jason's instruction, most of the campers had trouble managing their oars. Instead of all rowing together, they all rowed when they could, some faster and some slower. Some of the kids even made the oars push in the wrong direction. Danny's oar banged against the oar of the fat kid behind him, giving his arms a jolt that made him buzz all over. The galley barely moved.

Gilly began to sing, ''Row, row, row your boat . . .'' in a slow rhythmic way. The campers caught the beat and after that, the rowing went better. Jason took an oar and rowed too. They began to move in a big circle.

''Yikes,'' Andahseven cried as the handle of his oar lifted him in the air and flung him into the lake.

''Camper overboard!'' Ulysses cried.

Everybody stopped rowing and ran to the side of

the galley. Jason leaped onto the rail, steadied himself with one hand on the rigging, and searched the water. "There!" he cried and pointed at the place where Andahseven came up sputtering and thrashing around. Jason was about to dive into the water when everyone saw Gilly swimming like a dolphin toward Andahseven. "Great Poseidon," Jason cried.

Gilly sang as she swam and the water around Andahseven seemed to sort of gel. He couldn't thrash very well, but he also didn't sink. The water held him steady till Gilly arrived and dragged him back to the boat. Jason reached down with a pole and pulled them both from the water.

Jason took Andahseven by both shoulders and said, "What happened, boy?"

Andahseven, looking very miserable, said, "I guess I didn't dip far enough."

"Indeed," said Jason. "Your oar must have missed the water entirely." Ulysses brought a blanket which he wrapped around Andahseven. Somehow, wet and with the blanket around him, Andahseven looked even smaller than he did ordinarily.

Jason then grabbed Gilly by the forearm and said, "You are truly Poseidon's daughter."

"Shucks," Gilly said.

Jason and Ulysses conferred for a moment, and then Ulysses said, "We will circumnavigate the lake some other day." Jason opened a bag, letting lose a whirlwind he called Sport. Sport pushed them back to the dock.

After saving him, Gilly could not get rid of Andahseven. He followed her everywhere, even after they landed. "Look," said Gilly, "you fell into the water.

I saved you. You said thank you. You don't have to follow me around."

"Can I get you anything?" Andahseven said.

"You can leave me alone," Gilly said in exasperation.

Andahseven backed off a few paces, but he still followed her. At lunch, he hurried to the front of the line and brought Gilly her burger. He refilled her glass with root beer. Gilly gave up trying to make him stop, but she continued to glower at him when he brought her the apple cobbler for dessert.

Later, during quiet time, Danny was sitting on a stump reading *Space Cadet* by Robert Heinlein. Gilly walked up to him and said, "I think we have a problem."

"Why? Don't you like having a servant?"

"Get serious, Danny. Andahseven told me something, and I don't know whether to believe him or not."

Danny closed his book on a finger and said, "What did he say?"

"He told me that he would protect me from the trolls that live in Under Wood."

"Trolls?"

"You know, like in 'Three Billy Goats Gruff.' Big hairy evil-smelling guys who live under bridges and eat travelers."

"Give me a break, Gilly."

Gilly shook her head. "It would fit in with what C. D. told us, wouldn't it?"

"I guess." Danny knew that Gilly was right. It looked as if he was going to have an adventure after all. "Sure. Trolls. Why not?"

Chapter Three

Pretty Good Wonder Tales

But a few days passed without either mention or sign of trolls. Nothing bumped in the night, not even Andahseven, who had taken to sleeping on blankets on the floor of Vampire cabin. He was not so bad, no matter who or what he was, exactly. Even Gilly liked him, though she wished he'd leave her alone. She worked hard at ignoring him. Neither Mr. Forest nor Mr. Debarber seemed particularly concerned about having an extra kid to entertain and to feed. As Mr. Debarber said, "He obviously belongs here. How would he have gotten out here if he hadn't come on the bus?"

The kids in Frankie and Elisa's cabins ran around with egg carton bolts in their necks. They even made little battery-powered shockers which they learned not to use very often. Gilly taught her campers swimming and water songs. Of course when her campers sang, the melodies did not have the same effect on water as when Gilly did, but the songs were pretty and everybody seemed to enjoy learning them. C. D.

taught cape movement and good vampire grooming. His campers ran around with slicked-back hair and drank cherry soda from Thermoses.

Now that he didn't have to skulk around anymore, Andahseven became an enthusiastic camper. He got into being a vampire.

Despite C. D.'s reports and Andahseven's warning to Gilly, Danny almost forgot about the possibility that trolls were around. Then one morning, Humbert Battaglia, a chunky red-headed kid in Frankie's cabin, reported that some of his money had been stolen.

Frankie informed Mr. Debarber, who told Mr. Forest, who called a general assembly of the camp. According to Mr. Forest, Humbert Battaglia's money was just the latest in a string of things that had disappeared. A bag of marbles was missing, as were at least three pairs of sunglasses (one with Scooby-Do frames), a wristwatch, and a locket containing photographs of the camper's grandparents.

In the quiet that followed these revelations, Mr. Forest told everyone how sorry he was that such things happened and lectured them on the virtues of honesty and fair play. He assured them that if any of the loot was returned to his office, no questions would be asked.

When the show was over, everybody felt bad, even Humbert Battaglia, who admitted to Frankie, "Maybe I just lost it."

Supposing otherwise, Frankie invited his P.S. 13 friends to come and investigate. "We must start somewhere," Frankie said. "And Humbert Battaglia's loss is the most recent."

While most of the campers spread out and went

back to camp activities, Danny and his monster friends walked up the slope to the cabins. Ryan stayed behind to interview Humbert Battaglia.

"Where's Barbara?" Danny asked Elisa.

"She is making lightning bolts from ice cream sticks."

That was a relief.

Andahseven stood in the doorway of Frankenstein Boys cabin watching Frankie and his friends with big worried eyes.

"What's that terrible smell?" Danny said. It seemed to be compounded of the worst parts of skunk, burning rubber, and rotten eggs. The cabin was full of it.

C. D. frowned and said, "I remember something like this. I was told? I remember? It is a long time ago."

"Whatever it is," Gilly said, "let's get these windows up."

"Perhaps not," said Frankie. "Perhaps the smell is a clue. It was here when we awoke this morning."

C. D. nodded and wrapped himself tightly in his cape.

"What do you say, Andahseven?" Gilly said.

"I say nothing. If we don't talk about it, it will go away."

"What will go away?" Gilly said.

He shook his head as if trying to loosen something inside.

Ryan hustled up to the cabin, edged around Andahseven, and stood in the center of the single room, sniffing and looking around. "Did you figure out what that terrible smell is?"

"We were just discussing this," Elisa said.

Frankie said, "You have something to tell us, Ryan?"

"Not much. Last night Humbert Battaglia took his money out of his pockets and put it on the windowsill next to his bed. He figured that anybody who wanted to steal it would have to climb over him first."

"Very wise," said Elisa.

"When he got up this morning the money was gone."

"Not all of it," said Gilly. "A bunch of dollar bills are still here." She leaned across Humbert Battaglia's bed and took them from the windowsill. "Sticky too," she said as she attempted to pull them flat. "He's been counting his money and eating candy at the same time."

"Odd," said C. D.

"Yeah," said Ryan. "Why would anybody take only change when dollar bills were lying right there?"

Frankie looked at Andahseven for a moment, but said nothing to him. He leaned closer to the window and said, "Notice that the window is already up a little."

Frankie peered at the screen, and put his hand through a hole that looked as if it had been made by a thrown football. Something had snagged on the ragged inside edge. He pulled it loose and inspected it. "Hair," he said.

C. D. tapped Ryan on the shoulder and the two of them went outside.

"Raccoons?" Gilly said to Frankie hopefully.

"I think not," Frankie said, and handed her the shred of brown hair. It was coarse and dirty.

Danny could smell it from where he stood. "One gnarly smell," he said. He was now certain who had taken the money, but, like Andahseven, he didn't want to say the word out loud. Still, it needed to be said. Before he had a chance, Ryan and C. D. returned.

Ryan said, "You guys better come see what we found."

C. D. lead them around back. Under the window next to Humbert Battaglia's bed an enormous footprint was stamped into the hard ground. Elisa could stand in it with both feet and have room left over. The footprint had only three toes, each with a sharp claw at the end. Frankie followed a trail of them to where they disappeared into the forest.

"Trolls," Gilly said, saying what Danny had been thinking.

Andahseven whimpered and shrank back.

"I would say 'bingo,' " Danny said.

Frankie said, "Why would you say this?"

"Hard to explain," Danny said. "But I mean that I think Gilly is right."

C. D. said, "Indeed. Now I remember that smell. Once, in the Old Country, my family was on a picnic in the Schultzwald—a large forest much like Under Wood. While searching for a place to eat, we came upon a rocky shelf under which this smell was most strong. 'Trolls,' my parents said and hurried home."

"All right, Andahseven," Gilly said. "You're always asking if you can do something for me. Here's your big chance. Tell us about trolls."

Andahseven looked very unhappy, but he said,

"They come in the night because if sunlight strikes them they turn to stone."

"Why did they steal Humbert Battaglia's change and all that other stuff?"

"They're not interested in money," said Andahseven, "but they like shiny stuff." He groaned. "You're lucky they didn't eat one of you."

"What stopped them?"

"They do not feel bad about eating children, but they know that if they do it trouble follows. Men search the forest for a big animal. Trolls don't like to be disturbed."

Ryan said, "How do you know all this?"

"Everybody knows," said Andahseven and looked around warily.

Danny said, "If trolls are around here, I'm going home. I don't need to borrow trouble when I'm supposed to be having a good time."

"I have an idea," Frankie said. "We will be safe, I think." He walked out of the cabin in one of his creative dazes.

"Are you a troll?" Gilly asked Andahseven.

"No way," said Andahseven and shuddered. "I'm Swedish."

Danny was unconvinced. He said, "Swedes your age don't need to shave."

Andahseven covered his chin with both hands.

Frankie spent the rest of the day with Zelda Bella in her kitchen. He would say nothing about his project except that it would make them safe from trolls.

Kids on firewood detail spent a few hours that afternoon collecting wood, which they piled in the

center of a cleared area surrounded by a low wall made of smooth rocks. That evening, Camp Horrorific would have its first campfire.

After dinner the campers read or played games or admired the crafts of other campers. Around seven-thirty the sun sank behind the hickory trees and Mr. Forest lit the wood. Campers, now wearing their official Camp Horrorific jackets, gathered and sat on the wall. Ulysses and Jason brought ropes to the camp fire and mended them. Zelda Bella polished the aluminum silverware.

Mr. Debarber brought a square plastic bag from the administration cabin and handed it to Mr. Forest. Carefully, Mr. Forest withdrew a flat block of paper, yellow with age. He held it up in one hand and Danny could see that it was an ancient magazine with a painting of a yellow spaceship on the cover. The spaceship had blue fins, and the red death beams shooting from it blew up futuristic buildings on the ground. Aliens with three eyes and purple faces ran from the buildings.

Mr. Forest said, "This is the July 1932 issue of *Pretty Good Wonder Tales*." He held the magazine under his nose and inhaled deeply. "Ah," he said, "there's nothing like the aroma of an old pulp magazine. Tonight I read to you a story by the famous Commander R. A. MacDonald, Retired, called 'In the Forest of Enchantment.' You'll notice that the forest in the story is a lot like our own Under Wood." He looked around as if already frightened of what he was going to read. The campers giggled. He carefully opened the magazine and began to read.

"In the Forest of Enchantment" concerned a cou-

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ple of loggers who entered a virgin forest against the advice of a Gypsy woman they knew. But they were greedy and wanted to cut down all the trees they could and sell them for big bucks. By the end of the story the elves and fairies and other creatures that lived in the forest had turned the loggers into trees out on land owned by a big logging concern. Men were coming with saws.

When Mr. Forest began the story, campers fidgeted and made jokes to their neighbors, but as he went on, they got more and more quiet until everybody was listening hard and just barely breathing. After he finished nobody said a word. When a log on the fire popped, everybody jumped, even Mr. Forest.

Helping the scary effect was the fact that shapes moved beyond the light of the campfire; strange shuffling and burbling noises came from the forest too, but what caused them, Danny did not know. It was possible that the shapes where just the shadows of campers cast by the roaring, crackling campfire or maybe the noises were caused by the movements of small harmless animals.

Mr. Forest looked around, a satisfied expression on his face. He closed the July 1932 issue of *Pretty Good Wonder Tales,* and carefully inserted it into the plastic bag. He said, "You can't beat those old pulp stories."

Danny leaned across C. D. and Gilly to Andahseven, "Are those trolls out there?"

"Maybe," Andahseven said and shuddered.

They all shuddered.

"Pleasant dreams," Mr. Forest said. He sent everybody to bed.

When the campfire broke up Frankie approached Danny and said, "I am looking for volunteers." Frankie had already acquired Gilly, Ryan, C. D., and Elisa. He carried a big jar of something which in the firelight looked like yellow paint.

"Andahseven refused to come," Elisa said.

A wise move on Andahseven's part, Danny thought. He said, "Tonight?"

"Now."

Knowing that he had made the wrong decision, Danny said, "OK," and followed Frankie and the others into Under Wood.

Chapter Four

Mr. Debarber Gets it Right

Frankie had a big flashlight that he shined ahead of them.

"What are we doing out here?" Danny asked.

Frankie said nothing, but Elisa whispered, "Frankie could do this alone, but he is frightened."

"I don't blame him," Danny said.

Frankie found a spot he liked, and he poured some of his yellow stuff on the ground. It had the consistency of pancake batter, and it made a small thick puddle.

"What is it?" Ryan said.

"This," said Frankie, "is a troll motel." He carefully set a ball of aluminum foil in the middle of the puddle, where it gleamed. "Do not touch it," he said as Gilly bent to extend a finger at the yellow stuff. "It is very sticky. The aluminum foil ball will attract a troll. When he tries to pick it up, he will become stuck in the puddle. When the sun comes up, the light will turn the troll to stone."

"What happens to the puddle?" Ryan said. "Can't leave stuff like this lying around the forest."

"It is entirely safe and organic," Frankie said, "made from ingredients in Zelda Bella's kitchen. At the same time the sun is turning a troll to stone, it is evaporating the puddle. In less than one hour, the puddle will be gone."

" 'When it goes it's gone . . .' " Gilly sang softly.

Frankie put out four more troll-motels and then led his friends back to the clearing in front of the administration cabin. The embers of the campfire were still glowing and Danny was tempted to sit and watch them for a while, but everybody else went off to bed and he did not feel like sitting by himself.

Frankie slid in with his cabin mates after breakfast had already begun, and nodded to Danny. Whether that meant he'd caught a troll or not Danny didn't know. After breakfast, Frankie said, "We caught nothing."

"That's good, right?" Gilly said.

"Negative information is not useful. It means only that no troll stepped in our trap this time."

Andahseven said, "They're out there. Trust me."

When breakfast was over, Mr. Debarber stood up and announced that he would be leading a nature expedition into Under Wood in exactly one half hour. "Anybody who wants to come should meet me at the campfire pit."

Most of the campers wanted to go, leaving only a few kids behind to work on crafts projects they could not be convinced to abandon.

Zelda Bella had lunch bags made up for the campers. Danny stuffed his into his knapsack and joined the crowd following Mr. Debarber. As they walked into the shade of the trees, the air turned cooler and more fragrant. Shadows were mysterious but not unfriendly. Danny talked and joked with his friends, but he could not help noticing that Andahseven glanced from side to side with wide eyes, as if he were expecting something terrible to pounce at any time.

Mr. Debarber marched ahead, setting a vigorous example. Nearby, Danny heard Barbara grumble to Elisa that with Mr. Debarber leading, they'd be lost before they knew it.

"I heard that," Mr. Debarber called over his shoulder. "It is impossible for us to get lost. I am an expert woodsman. Besides, I'm following this path."

The path Mr. Debarber spoke of seemed to be no more than a slightly wider space among the trees. It might have been a path or it might have been Mr. Debarber's imagination.

Mr. Debarber referred to a small book, much like Barbara's *Girls' Pathfinders Handbook*. He pointed out tall oaks and hickories, and bushy junipers and arrowwoods. "Those spiky purple flowers are foxgloves. They bloom only every other year."

"Very interesting," Ryan said as he wrote all this down in his spiral-bound notebook.

Danny heard a lot of birds but didn't see many, just the occasional woodpecker. Squirrels were everywhere.

"Look," cried Mr. Debarber. "Fairies!" He pointed to a mossy place among the thick tangled

roots of an old tree. The kids quickly gathered around and said, "Where? Where?"

Mr. Debarber shook his head sadly and said, "They ran off. You missed 'em. Maybe we'll see some farther on."

Frankie said, "There are no fairies."

"Of course there are," Mr. Debarber said as he walked away. "Didn't you hear Mr. Forest's story at the campfire last night?"

"That was just a story," Elisa said.

"Suit yourself," Mr. Debarber said, and kept moving.

Shortly, Mr. Debarber said, "Look! Fairy footprints!"

This time when the kids crowded around, they actually saw something—tiny holes in the leaves of a juniper bush. Each hole had black edges.

"What do you think, Gilly?" Ryan said.

Gilly studied the holes for a moment and said, "Fairy footprints, I guess," and shrugged.

Frankie said, "No."

"What is it, then?" Mr. Debarber asked.

Frankie picked a leaf and held it up. He said, "In the morning there are dewdrops on these leaves. Each dewdrop acts like a tiny magnifying glass. When sunlight shines through one of them, the drop focuses the light into a very hot spot and burns a tiny hole." He shook his head. "Not fairies. Physics."

"That's one explanation, I suppose," Mr. Debarber said.

Humbert Battaglia said, "Frankie's explanation is just as weird as Mr. Debarber's."

"Physics is impervious to disbelief," Frankie said.

He followed when Mr. Debarber moved on. Gilly pulled at another foxglove leaf that had tiny holes in it and asked Andahseven, "What do you think?"

"Frankie is right this time."

"And other times?"

C. D. said, "Dewdrops will not explain the footprint under Humbert Battaglia's window."

"If it comes to that," Danny said, "I never heard of a fairy with a foot that size either." Trolls, Danny thought. There are trolls here. The woods are probably crawling with them. Just out of eyesight until they attack. We should all go back to Brooklyn before they take all our change and eat us.

It was possible everybody else was thinking the same thing. After a while, Elisa said only, "We are getting behind. Let us go."

They followed the noise Mr. Debarber made as he crashed through Under Wood, and soon caught up. A few times Mr. Debarber pointed out fairy treasure or fairy marks or fairies themselves that no one else was quick enough to see. Most kids stopped even bothering to look after a while, but Mr. Debarber continued to be entertained by his little joke. Frankie checked each time and seemed neither disappointed nor pleased when he saw nothing. He merely nodded as if he'd noted one more piece of information.

When the sun was high they entered a glade and stopped for lunch. Rocks of varying sizes, from chairs to houses, thrust up through the green grassy mat. In the center of the glade water bubbled from under a flat stone and ran off in a narrow stream. The campers spread out and took possession of the rocks, looking a little like fairies themselves as they lounged.

"What is this?" Harold asked and pulled something from his lunch sack.

Danny looked at what he had in his own sack. It was a small mound of bread that had spiced meat inside.

"Ah," said C. D. "Piroshki." He took a pull of his Fluid of Life.

Danny heard Harold say to Jack, "More of that strange food. I don't know who's weirder, Arthur Debarber or Zelda Bella."

But once the campers stopped wondering what it was and dug in, the piroshki was as big a success as the goulash had been. Danny, Ryan, and the monster kids were gnawing on the apples that Zelda Bella had included, when Gilly ran around a boulder not much smaller than Vampire cabin and cried, "Look what I found!" She grabbed C. D., who was closest, and ran off. Danny and the others followed and found Gilly and C. D. dancing inside a ring of big flat-headed mushrooms. Gilly shook her head from side to side and danced with her usual wild abandon. " 'Gotta dance! Gotta dance!' " Gilly sang. C. D. was more courtly and conservative in his movements, but he seemed to be having a good time.

"A fairy ring," Frankie said.

"What?" said Ryan.

"This is what the circle of mushrooms is called," Elisa said. "It is said to be caused by the dancing of fairies."

"Superstition," said Frankie. "Such a ring is caused by a central mushroom throwing off spores in a circular pattern."

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Gilly stopped singing and just hummed to herself as she continued to shimmy around. In the comparative silence, Danny heard noises in the trees beyond the glade. Everyone but Gilly and C. D. were listening carefully. The noises sounded like the ones Danny had heard beyond the firelight on the previous night. But in addition to the scurrying around, he heard the breaking of timber and occasional growls.

C. D. stopped dancing and, a little sheepishly, stepped out of the ring. Soon after, even Gilly noticed that something was wrong and stood still. "What's that noise?" she said.

Frankie shook his head.

"Trolls," Andahseven said.

Gilly stepped closer to the sound. In doing so she stepped out of the fairy ring and the noise stopped. She stepped into the ring and it started again.

"Maybe they don't like dancing," Ryan said.

"I'm real tired of maybe," Gilly said. She stalked off and the rest of them followed. They found her kneeling at the spot where the water bubbled out of the ground. The rest of the campers were standing in a clump near a big rock looking around worriedly. When Mr. Debarber saw Gilly and the others, he said, "Come on. Time to go." He sounded worried himself.

"What does the water say?" Elisa asked.

Gilly stood up and said, "For once Mr. Debarber has it right. Time to go. Past time."

"Trolls?" Danny said.

" 'We got it bad and that ain't good.' "

Danny turned to the group and cried, "Head 'em

up! Move 'em out!'' He picked up his knapsack and walked to Mr. Debarber.

''All right, campers,'' Mr. Debarber called. ''This way.'' With confidence, he marched into the forest.

''Is this the way we came?'' Ryan asked.

''I hope so,'' said Danny. ''All these trees look pretty much alike.''

They walked for a long time. The sun sank in the sky, and city boy though he was, Danny knew this meant night was approaching. It had been hours since he'd seen anything he could even pretend looked familiar. The path they had followed on the way out, if it had ever existed, seemed to have disappeared.

The darker the forest became, the slower Mr. Debarber walked. Because the nature hike was to have been a daytime activity, nobody had thought to bring a flashlight. As slowly as they crept along, everybody was tripping over roots and holes in the ground. A few of the younger campers were whimpering softly. The whole troop made so much noise, Danny didn't even know if the trolls or whatever had followed them from the glade. But he was certain the vast shadows could be hiding anything.

At last Mr. Debarber sat down on a fallen tree and faced the campers. In the dim white glow that came from the sky, Mr. Debarber's face looked slack and sickly. He attempted a smile, but it was not a success. He said, ''Well, campers, we have a really terrific opportunity here to practice our survival skills.''

''We are lost,'' Frankie said.

''Not exactly lost,'' Mr. Debarber said. ''I just don't know quite where we are.''

Danny jumped when something touched him. He

looked down and saw that Barbara was clutching his hand. A worried expression was on her face. He didn't pull away or make fun of her. He squeezed back.

Chapter Five

Fairy Light, Fairy Darkness

"Do you know where the camp is?" Humbert Battaglia asked.

"It's around here someplace," Mr. Debarber said. "I'm positive."

"Monster camp," said Humbert Battaglia. "What a stupid idea."

"Yeah," Jack and Joe and a lot of the other campers agreed.

"Look," said Harold. "There's a light."

Everyone looked in the direction Harold was pointing.

Mr. Debarber leaped to his feet and said, "It's Mr. Forest. He's out looking for us."

To Danny, Mr. Forest did not seem the type to be wandering around out in Under Wood, especially not at night, not even with a flashlight. Yet who else could it be?

Moving much faster than he had in hours, Mr. Debarber led them toward the light. "J. Manley!"

Mr. Debarber cried. "J. Manley!" If it was Mr. Forest, he did not hear Mr. Debarber, because the light did not move toward them. As a matter of fact, as quickly as they moved, it always seemed to be the same distance away.

They stopped briefly to rest and, something evil and unclean chuckled near them.

"What was that?" Barbara said.

"Some night animal," Mr. Debarber said, his voice shaking. "Let's keep moving."

They trotted on after the light, Danny pulling Barbara along.

Some time later, C. D. spoke breathlessly, "Mr. Debarber."

"What is it?" Mr. Debarber said.

"I think we are going deeper into Under Wood."

"Impossible," Mr. Debarber said. "Why would Mr. Forest lead us into the woods?"

"Perhaps we are not following Mr. Forest," Elisa said.

Mr. Debarber didn't answer but he kept moving. Not long after Elisa had made her suggestion, they entered a clearing. In the near blackness, the trees seemed like the columns of a cathedral. Directly above, Danny saw so many stars, they looked like clouds of powdered sugar on a black table. The light, as far away as ever, hung among the trees on the other side of the clearing.

Mr. Debarber took a step toward the light. He yelped and stopped suddenly when he was confronted by a very short man who appeared out of the air. The tiny man threw back the hood of his cloak and faced Mr. Debarber sternly, hands on hips. Mr. Debarber

tried to back up but there was no place to go because the crowd of campers was surrounded by these short men, all of whom appeared from thin air wearing hooded cloaks.

"Trolls," cried Ryan.

For a moment each group examined the other, and in the pale moon and starlight, Danny got a good look at the creatures that had captured the campers. They were no taller than Barbara and they had long rough beards that reached to their waists. Each of them had on a miner's hat, complete with lamp that glowed with fireflies; their clothing was overrun with snaps and buckles and buttons, even in places Danny would not expect to find such things.

"Trolls indeed," said the creature who had stopped Arthur Debarber. "Andahseven, come here and tell these poor lost wayfarers who we are."

"Right you are, Gnorble." Andahseven stepped out from among the campers. Now Danny could see a resemblance between him and their captors. Andahseven didn't have a beard, but if he stopped shaving he would probably have one soon enough.

"You're a spy," Danny said with surprise.

"You can't blame us," the one called Gnorble said. "When our new tunnel came out near your camp we had to investigate. Andahseven gave you a good report." He grinned and showed enormous crooked teeth. "One among you named Gilly Finn got a very good report."

Kindly, Gilly said, "You're just a little bearded marshmallow, aren't you, Andahseven?" Danny could almost feel the heat from Andahseven's blush.

"Besides," Gnorble said, "when two of you

danced in the fairy ring we sensed that you were related to European monsters, our cousins.''

''Gilly and C. D. are real monsters?'' Jack said.

For a moment, nobody said anything. Danny could see his friends' problem. If they admitted to being monsters, trouble would certainly follow back at camp and then in Brooklyn. If his friends denied they were monsters, these little men might turn nasty.

''It appears that way,'' Frankie said. His statement seemed to satisfy everybody, at least for the moment.

''I bet those little guys are Smurfs,'' Humbert Battaglia whispered.

''They can't be,'' Barbara whispered back. ''They're not blue. And they're much too big.''

''If I could have your attention,'' Andahseven said. ''We are not trolls nor Smurfs either. We are dwarfs.''

''Like Snow White and the seven—'' Gilly began.

Andahseven said, ''Right. Right. Just like that. Great movie.''

''I am astonished,'' Frankie said. ''I did not believe in such things.''

''Monsters are monsters, big guy,'' Gilly said. ''Maybe fairies exist too.''

Frankie shrugged and Elisa patted him on the shoulder.

''Why did you lead us here?'' Mr. Debarber said. He sounded angry.

''We didn't lead you here,'' Gnorble said. ''It was the will-o'-the-wisp, a fairy light that works for the trolls.''

''We were being led into a trap,'' C. D. cried.

"It's possible, I suppose," Mr. Debarber said and rubbed his chin.

"It's more than possible, pilgrim," Gnorble said. "It's certain. The will-o'-the-wisp leads you around till you are tired, hungry, and lost. Then Pah, Con, and Nah find you."

Andahseven said, "What happens next is not pretty."

"Pah, Con, and Nah are trolls?" Elisa asked.

"Always," Gnorble said. "All trolls have one of these three names. They're not very creative, but they're awfully mean."

"Sure," said Gilly and laughed. "Pah Troll, Con Troll, and Nah Troll."

"Only three?" said Frankie.

"You'll find that three are more than a muchness," Andahseven said.

Gnorble studied the surrounding trees for a moment and said, "Morning is a long way off and troll energy is running high. We'd best be going."

"Going where?" Mr. Debarber said.

"Back to your camp, of course."

Mr. Debarber bit his lower lip, and the campers glanced around to see how the others were taking Gnorble's suggestion. As far as Danny could tell, it was not going down well. He himself had heard no arguments in favor of trusting the dwarfs, if that's what they were.

Without certainty, Gilly said, "Andahseven seems pretty trustworthy, I guess."

"I would not hurt any of you," Andahseven said.

In an exasperated tone, Gnorble said, "None of us

would. We are dwarfs. It is not our way to start trouble. We leave that to the trolls.''

No one did anything. After leading them this far, apparently not even Mr. Debarber wanted to be responsible for deciding whether or not to trust the dwarfs.

Gnorble shrugged and said, ''We won't force help on you. Come along, men.'' He turned away and lifted the hood of his cloak. As it covered his head, he disappeared. All the other dwarfs but Andahseven did the same.

''I'd like to stay,'' Andahseven said.

''Come along, Andahseven.'' Gnorble's voice came out of the empty air.

Andahseven turned to Gilly and said, ''Please change your mind.''

Gilly looked uncomfortable. She said, ''If it was just you, Andahseven, I would.''

Andahseven nodded unhappily and held out his big knobby hand. Gilly shook it, and took a step back. Andahseven walked away. A cloak appeared, held by a disembodied hand. Andahseven took it and put it on. He was about to lift the hood when the will-o'-the-wisp glided into the clearing and circled Mr. Debarber and the campers, casting a stark pink light over everything.

Danny smelled the odor of skunk, burning rubber, and rotten eggs. ''Trolls,'' he cried.

A moment later, three trolls, each the size of an upended schoolbus, stepped into the clearing.

Chapter Six

In Dwarfs We Trust

The trolls brandished spiked clubs and in their screechy voices yelled their fearsome battle cry, "A troll! A troll!" They sounded like a battalion of people scraping their fingernails against a blackboard. Coarse dirty hair covered their bodies. Each foot had three toes. The smell was nearly overwhelming.

Many of the campers screamed. Danny and Barbara, still holding hands, just backed away. Danny hoped that whatever terrible thing the trolls did to them would be done quickly. Moving like gorillas, the trolls loped forward with their arms dangling.

Suddenly the air bristled with short swords and picks. In their cloaks of invisibility, the dwarfs attacked and banged about the trolls' ankles and calves. The trolls stopped, looked around confused, and grabbed for the dwarfs' weapons. Every time they reached down they were stabbed with the sharp point of a pick or a sword and they pulled their hands back. "Oink!" the trolls cried plaintively. "Oink!"

"Go! Leave! Escape!" Gnorble's voice cried. "We'll catch up."

Danny did not need to consider whether Gnorble could be trusted. Escaping was definitely a good idea, and the direction didn't matter. Away from the trolls was all Danny wanted. "This way," he cried as he pulled Barbara in among the trees.

He kept running after he was out of breath. He kept running after his side began to hurt. He kept running after Barbara pleaded that he stop and she was no more than a dead weight at the end of his arm. It was only when he reached a stream that was too wide to jump across that he stopped and looked back. He let go of Barbara and they both sat down on a rock.

Panting, Ryan ran up and asked, "Where are you going?"

"I don't know," Danny said. "Just away."

Gilly reached the stream, and with the little breath she had left began to sing. While the water parted, Danny said, "I'm not sure that's the right way. Maybe we should wait to see if the dwarfs come after us." With some relief, Gilly let the water close up again.

A bat circled them. As it landed, it opened like a telescope into C. D. He drank some Fluid of Life and said, "The dwarfs are coming."

"And the trolls?"

Elisa and Frankie ran up, closely followed by more campers. Elisa said, "The trolls are large and fearsome, but they are not smart. They will not be able to track the dwarfs through the woods."

Danny hoped Elisa was right. While they waited

for the rest of the campers, he thought he saw a light floating very far away. It could have been the will-o'-the-wisp, but Danny was not about to go make sure.

The last to arrive was Arthur Debarber. Even in the dim light, he looked unhealthy. "Out of shape, I guess," he wheezed. When he breathed he sounded like a rusty old steam engine. He looked around and said, "Everybody here?"

Nobody noticed that anybody was missing, which relieved Mr. Debarber.

A rustling began among the undergrowth and Danny prepared to run again. But before he could even struggle to his feet, the dwarfs threw back their hoods and became visible.

"May I examine one of those cloaks?" Frankie asked.

"No," said Gnorble simply. He looked around at the exhausted campers and said, "Do you still want to search for the camp alone?"

"I trust you now," said Ryan.

There was a mumble of agreement among the campers. Mr. Debarber said, "We would be delighted to have a guide."

"I thought so," said Gnorble. "Let's go." Danny would have preferred another few minutes' rest, but Gnorble tramped off through the woods. No one wanted to be left behind.

Danny's sweaty shirt was cold against his skin and he kept imagining that he recognized a particular spot as being just around the corner from Camp Horrorific.

His only hope as he put one foot in front of the other was that the dwarfs knew where they were going.

In less than an hour, the dwarfs brought the campers to Camp Horrorific. Despite all the walking the campers had done, Mr. Debarber and then the will-o'-the-wisp must have led them in circles.

Though it would be dark for some hours yet, a light was on in the administration cabin. Three forest service cars were parked out in front. Evidently Mr. Forest and the rangers were planning a search.

"We are glad to be home," C. D. said, "but we must soon confront the trolls again. They have stolen many things from this camp."

"So Andahseven told us," said Gnorble.

"If you will help us," Elisa said, "we will retrieve them."

"That's OK," Humbert Battaglia said. "The trolls can keep my change."

Many of the other campers agreed that the trolls were welcome to what they'd taken.

"We will retrieve your property," Elisa said firmly.

Gnorble walked off a few paces and conferred with Andahseven and the other dwarfs. There was a lot of growling and handwaving. One of the dwarfs threw his short sword on the ground and danced on it. Gnorble crossed his arms and waited. The dancing dwarf put his sword away, and Andahseven walked to where the campers waited.

"We will meet you here tonight just after campfire," Andahseven said. "Be ready." He bowed to Gilly and walked away without another word. The

dwarfs put up the hoods on their cloaks of invisibility and, well, disappeared.

When J. Manley Forest and the rangers heard about the trolls and the dwarfs and the will-o'-the-wisp, they could only conclude that Arthur Debarber had concocted this story and had encouraged the kids to tell it.

The rangers did not care one way or another; they were satisfied that everybody had turned up safe. But when the rangers were gone, Mr. Forest said, "So tell me: What really happened?"

"Trolls," Humbert Battaglia cried.

"Dwarfs," said Jack.

Mr. Forest looked at Mr. Debarber and waited. Mr. Debarber said, "We got lost. We found our way and came home."

"That's what I thought," Mr. Forest said. "All right. Everybody get some sleep."

The day was more than half gone when Danny awoke. He put on his clothes and walked down to the mess cabin to see if he could scrounge some food from Zelda Bella. It turned out that Zelda Bella had been feeding tired, hungry campers all morning, whenever they straggled in. She was ready with pancakes, sausages and hot chocolate.

Danny and his friends spent most of the day putting together a mammoth jigsaw puzzle of the Andromeda galaxy. Knowing what was to come that evening, Danny even took a nap. Most of the other campers were willing to pretend that nothing had been stolen and that nothing special would happen that night.

That evening Zelda Bella served some strange

chicken dish that had paprika all over it. Few campers complained. At the campfire Mr. Forest told another story from *Pretty Good Wonder Tales*. This one was about robots and spaceships and was not nearly so scary as the one he'd read before.

When the campfire was over, Mr. Forest sent everyone to bed. Danny walked up the slope to Vampire cabin, then circled back down through the trees. Mr. Forest and Mr. Debarber were sitting on the stone wall talking in low voices while the embers of the fire glowed.

Waiting for Danny opposite the administration cabin were his monster friends and Ryan. "Where's everybody else?" said Danny. "Where's Barbara?"

Elisa said, "Barbara tells me that she had sufficient adventure last night."

"I believe," said C. D., "the others feel the same."

"Then it's just us," Ryan said. He smiled grimly.

Gnorble and Andahseven arrived and lowered their hoods. Gnorble said, "Is this all that are coming?"

"We might ask the same question," Frankie said.

Gnorble set his fists on his hips and glared at them. Andahseven said, "Most dwarfs would rather work in the mines than tangle with trolls."

"So it is with us," Frankie said.

"More or less," said Gilly.

"All right, then," said Gnorble.

The dwarfs kept their hoods down so that the kids could follow. Andahseven stuck close to Gilly. Instead of going the whole way through Under Wood, as Danny had expected, Gnorble lead them into a

cave. If not for the lanterns on the dwarfs' hats, they would have had to march in darkness.

At the back wall of the cave Gnorble said a word that Danny could not repeat. It was a harsh guttural sound, like a rock slide. The back wall opened as if on hinges, letting bright light into the cave.

Danny and the others crowded through and stood at the top landing of a long staircase made of some glassy material without a scratch on it. Diamond? The staircase descended along the wall of a cavern that was so large Danny could not see the far side. The ceiling was lost in cloudy luminous stuff that could only have been magic fire; it illuminated the place with a bright white light.

Below was what looked like an ocean. Waves leaped across it like fish. Boats of many sizes and shapes swarmed over it, some using wind power, some being rowed, and some evidently powered by the same energy that lit the ceiling.

At the bottom of the stairs they walked through a city built on many levels. It had stairways instead of sidewalks. Buildings were simple but sturdy, and made entirely of stone. Dwarfs went about their business with enthusiasm but without hurry. City dwarfs nodded at Danny and his friends, but never stared or pointed or laughed.

C. D. said, "Who would think such a place existed near Camp Horrorific?"

"Or near Brooklyn?" Frankie said.

Gnorble and Andahseven were not very good tour guides. Ryan might point at a particularly fine building, one with pillars carved into the shape of dwarfs, and ask what it was. Gnorble or Andahseven—they

took turns—would report that it was a building. Boats were also boats, and dwarfs were dwarfs.

Gnorble ushered Danny and the others into a long narrow boat powered by magic fire. Without being controlled in any obvious way, it left the high stone dock and glided across the sea.

Gilly hummed, and soon water danced around the boat, sending fountains high into the air, rising on both sides like walls, and even spiraling around the boat so that it seemed to be sailing through a long corkscrew of rising and diving water. Danny was impressed, though the show drenched him with spray.

Gnorble and Andahseven were delighted with the spectacle, and dwarfs in other boats laughed and waved as they passed. Gilly bowed and curtsied and wasn't paying attention to where they were going. When they neared a three-story waterfall, she was almost swept overboard into the thundering, creaming waters.

For a moment Danny feared Gnorble meant to drown them, but the boat easily slid behind the waterfall and along a dim canal not much wider than the boat itself. Gilly sang another song and dried them all instantly.

They sailed around curves and switchbacks, through a few areas lit by torches where hundreds of dwarfs were industriously picking at the walls with picks and loading the resulting rocks with shovels into waiting cars that ran on tracks. Smaller waterfalls were everywhere—many, Danny was convinced, just for decoration.

The boat stopped at one of the areas of greatest mining activity. Gnorble lead them up the sea steps

to the dock, and then back along the crowded tunnel. The dwarfs worked silently, without the singing Danny had expected.

Occasionally the tunnel opened into rooms the size of indoor coliseums. These rooms were filled with rock formations that looked like crowds of people or cities or seashells or magnificent pipe organs. Except for the formations, these rooms were empty.

One such room narrowed back into a tunnel in which the only illumination was the firefly light in the hats of Gnorble and Andahseven. Gnorble said another magic word, and the dead end of the tunnel misted and disappeared. He stepped out into the open air followed closely by Andahseven. Danny and Ryan went out, then Gilly and the two Stein kids.

Gnorble looked around, got his bearings, and set off through the forest.

Though the forest they walked through was much like the one they'd walked through with Mr. Debarber the night before, Danny wasn't afraid they would get lost. He had confidence in the dwarfs. He had sufficient evidence they both could find their way around in a forest and could deal with trolls.

The cool air was filled with the aroma of pine and of night-blooming flowers. Far in the distance, something glowed. It may have been the will-o'-the-wisp, but neither Danny nor anyone he was with would fall for that old trick this evening.

They did not speak as they went on their way, and Danny lost track of how long they had been walking. Sometimes he felt as if they'd been walking for hours. Other times he was certain that only minutes

had passed. The ground was flat and made for easy travel.

They came to a ravine that cut across their path. In the darkness, Danny had no way of knowing how deep it was but Andahseven said, "An army of trolls could be down there and we'd never know it."

"Three will be plenty," Danny said.

"Zero would be good," Gilly said.

Gnorble lead them to the top of a gully. He sat down and slid out of sight. They heard him bumping down the slope, and then sudden silence. When it was Danny's turn, he felt a desire to be anywhere else—maybe doing arithmetic homework back in Brooklyn. Reluctantly, he pushed off. He half slid half fell down the sandy slit, using his feet as brakes. He tried to avoid the worst of the rocks and roots that reached out for him.

At the bottom, he rolled onto a wide beachlike shelf in front of a dark hole in the side of the ravine. The hole looked big enough to hide a circus full of elephants. The foul troll smell was so intense it almost made Danny sick. He breathed through his mouth.

When everybody was down, C. D. said, "Our possessions are in there?"

Gnorble said, "The smell is terrible, I know, but it is night, and the trolls are not likely to be home."

"I thought trolls lived under bridges," Ryan said.

"Some of 'em do," Andahseven said. "But they live any place where they can get out of the sun. Besides," he looked around fearfully, "there aren't any bridges around here big enough for Con, Pah, and Nah."

As they walked through the enormous portal,

Danny pulled out his flashlight and shined it around. They were in a short entryway that turned at right angles and let them into the main cave. Even when the sun was high, none of its light would get in here.

The trolls had obviously been collecting things for years, maybe for centuries. Danny didn't know how long a troll lived. Too long, he was sure. Piled every which way were bits of broken bottle glass, chrome automobile bumpers, headlights, balls and sheets of aluminum foil, an entire roll of chain link fence, and bones. Lots of bones. Danny didn't know whether they came from humans or forest animals, but just the great number of them made him nervous. At one side, water dripped slowly but steadily from the tip of a cone-shaped formation that hung from the ceiling. Over the years the water had collected in a small round pool.

"I've seen better organized trash dumps," Gilly said.

"Yeah," said Ryan. "We'll never find our stuff."

"Let us be logical," Frankie said. He began to poke around, lifting things and letting them fall back.

Elisa nodded. "The things stolen from Camp Horrorific came here recently. Perhaps they are on top."

Danny and C. D. walked through the cave while the others began to do what Frankie was doing. Danny said, "I'm not so sure Frankie has things figured out right this time."

"How so?" C. D. said.

"Frankie is thinking logically. It's pretty obvious that the trolls never hooked two thoughts together in their lives. Our stuff could be anywhere." Danny froze and pointed. C. D.'s eyes got big when he saw

what had Danny's attention. Carefully, they backed up the way they came.

"What?" Gnorble said when he saw the looks on their faces.

"It's a troll," Danny whispered hoarsely.

"Where?" Andahseven said.

"Back there," C. D. said and pointed to the back of the cave.

In his regular voice, Frankie said, "That is not possible. If a troll were here, it would have attacked us by now." He walked confidently toward the back of the cave, with Elisa right behind him, then the two dwarfs, then Gilly and Ryan. Danny and C. D. looked at each other and shrugged. "I'll be sorry," Danny said.

"If you have time," C. D. said.

They followed the others.

Danny and C. D. stood in the group that had formed at the back of the cave. There, bathed in the light from the dwarfs' lamps and from all the flashlights in the place, crouched the troll. It matched the color of the cave walls and it didn't move.

"It's a statue!" Ryan said.

"As I expected," Frankie said. He walked forward and tapped his knuckles against the finger the troll extended.

"Very lifelike," Andahseven said appreciatively.

"It should be," Elisa said. "It was once alive. Frankie caught it."

"Hard to believe," Gnorble said and made a face.

"But true," Elisa said. "Frankie trapped it with his troll motel."

"Hard to believe," Gnorble said again.

"How it came to be here is not important," said Frankie. "It is important only that we now have one less troll to worry about."

"I'll give you that," Gnorble said.

They admired the troll for a while, as if it were a piece of artwork in a museum. Danny was amazed how something that was so frightening when real could be so interesting when made out of stone.

C. D. said, "A moment, please. Look here." He pointed to a small plastic likeness of Scooby-Doo sticking out from behind the troll's heel. Around back of the troll, he cried out, "Our things are here." Dropping change and marbles as he carried them, he brought out an armful of stuff. Aside from the money and marbles, he'd found sunglasses, watches, and jewelry.

"That looks like the loot Mr. Forest described," Ryan said.

The dwarfs and the kids ran to pick up what C. D. had dropped and to search for more stolen goods behind the troll. They divided the loot—as Ryan described it—and walked toward the cave entrance.

"That wasn't so—" Gilly said.

She was interrupted by a roar that came from the front of the cave. They all turned and held up their arms to protect their eyes from hot breath so foul that Danny almost fainted.

A snarling troll walked into the cave with another behind it. They had their clubs raised, and they looked angry.

Chapter Seven

Death Wish Danny

"I don't suppose we can reason with them," Frankie said.

He and everybody else were backing away.

"Maybe they just want their stuff," Danny said. He dropped the loot he was carrying, but continued to retreat. The others did the same. The trolls didn't even notice. The continued to advance, growling and snarling, and even stepped on the stuff the dwarfs and kids had just abandoned.

Gilly said, "I guess once they have something the fun is over."

Elisa said, "I think they are more interested in us at the moment."

The dwarfs and kids backed between the legs of the stone troll at the rear of the cave. One of the live trolls shrieked and lifted his club. He gave the statue a mighty blow. The crash almost deafened Danny and stone chips flew everywhere. The dwarfs and kids scurried to stay out of the way of falling stone body

parts. The second troll joined the first, and together they continued to beat on the statue until nothing was left to smash but gravel. While smashing the gravel the trolls continued to howl.

Ryan began to heave junk at the trolls. Danny and C. D. helped, but the shower of headlights, bicycle reflectors, and key chains bothered them no more than a light rain might. Meanwhile, the dwarfs attacked with their short swords, hacking at the trolls' ankles. At the same time, Frankie and Elisa gestured at the trolls with open hands and shot crackling lightning bolts at them.

Under this barrage, the trolls whimpered and backed away, brushing at the dwarfs and flinching at the electricity. "We cannot keep this up for long," Elisa cried.

And indeed, the lightning bolts got smaller and weaker and at last fizzled out altogether. While Frankie and Elisa stood there, drained, the trolls advanced again despite the spirited fighting of the dwarfs.

Gilly sang the water out of the pool, split it in two, and sent the enormous drops to rush all over the trolls like silvery bugs. The trolls screamed and giggled and danced around, making a thunderous noise in the enclosed space. One of them tripped over a pile of bicycles, and the other fell over him. They shook their heads as if stunned, and in that moment, Danny thought he and the others might escape.

Gilly stopped singing and led the way to the front of the cave. But the trolls blocked the opening with their tree trunk legs. The dwarfs could not get close enough to use their short swords because the trolls,

being on the floor, were now in position to make mad grabs at whomever came close.

Danny and the others retreated to the back of the cave and watched the trolls as they clumsily got to their feet and began to hunt angrily through their junk. They snorted and burped as they moved. Not even Stevie Brickwald at his worst was this disgusting.

"Maybe we can make it out the door while they're looking for us," Gilly said.

C. D. shook his head and said, "They have long arms."

The kids looked at the dwarfs, whose faces were grim but uninspired. Andahseven said, "Sorry, Gilly."

"Shut up," Gnorble said.

The browsing of the trolls was bringing them closer and Danny feared that at any minute he and the others would be discovered. He glanced around, hoping something helpful would leap out at him. And it did. Maybe. Possibly.

He whispered to Gilly, "Come on."

"What?"

Danny crawled across the uneven floor on his belly. When he reached his goal, Gilly crawled up next to him and whispered in a cowboy voice, "What's your plan, pardner?"

Danny hoped his lack of confidence would not color his voice when he said, "Help me stand up this mirror and aim it at the trolls' faces."

"Is this a good idea, Danny?"

"I don't know. Just do it."

"Right. Couldn't hurt."

Together Danny and Gilly lifted the heavy mirror. It was the size of a window and it had a gilt frame.

They lugged it around and aimed it up at the nearest troll, which at the moment was fondling an old frying pan.

"Get his attention," Danny whispered.

"What?"

"Get his attention."

"Death Wish Danny," Gilly said. Then she opened her mouth wide and gave a piercing scream. Both trolls turned and looked in her direction. The trolls screamed even louder than Gilly had and ran out of the cave. Danny could hear them blundering through the growth as they scrambled out of the ravine.

"Come on, everybody," Danny cried, and began to run. Outside the cave, the air was comparatively free of troll smell and Danny took a deep breath. Faster than he thought possible, he clambered up the gully he had slid down not an hour before. The dwarfs and the other kids were close behind him.

When they gathered at the top of the gully, Frankie said, "What did you do to the trolls?"

Danny tried hard not to gloat when he said simply, "I scared them with their own reflections."

Everybody got a good laugh out of that, but in the silence that followed, they heard the trolls returning. Danny and the others took off across country. The forest that had seemed so friendly earlier was now even more frightening than it had been the night before. Branches whipped back and slapped Danny in the face; roots tripped him; shadows hid rocks that he fell over. And all the time, the trolls were not far behind and getting closer.

The kids and the dwarfs kept moving even when C. D. leaped into the air and flew off as a bat. Over

his own hard breathing, Danny heard the trolls begin to shout. Hopefully, C. D. had succeeded in frightening them off.

But when C. D. returned and transformed into a boy, he said, "I could not stop them. They are too big. With all my flapping, I was no more than a fly. They come yet."

Danny thought they were getting closer to the magic door through which they had entered the forest from the dwarf kingdom, but he knew that might be thinking wishfully. For the last few minutes, troll smell had been getting stronger. He imagined he could hear their snorting and spitting.

Then he broke through the line of trees and saw a tall stone cliff. Over his shoulder, he saw the trolls.

Gnorble stopped in front of a vaguely door-shaped patch in the cliff and said a magic dwarf word. The patch misted and disappeared. Andahseven cried, "Come on! Hurry!" Gilly was the closest to the door, but she was still ten feet away when the lead troll grabbed her and Ryan and Elisa with a hand the size of an oil drum. They screamed as he lifted them into the air. While Danny watched his friends in horror, he felt himself lifted into the air in the hard, rough grasp of the other troll. Frankie and C. D. cried out, and he may have done so himself.

The last thing Danny saw before the troll carried him and his friends into the forest was the faces of Gnorble and Andahseven looking out of the magic doorway, dumbfounded with distress.

Chapter Eight

Br'er Rabbit Strikes Again!

The trolls strolled through the nighttime forest in no particular hurry. Still, with their long strides they moved very quickly and the trees spun past in a way that made Danny dizzy if he watched. Danny's troll held him, Frankie, and C. D. upright, as if he were carrying a bunch of flowers. Ahead, the other troll carried Gilly, Ryan, and Elisa in a similar way.

Danny was being held just a little too tightly, and what he imagined was a callus the size of a watermelon prodded him in the back. Still, his hands were free; that was something. And he was able to breathe the fresh air that blew into his face.

Frankie and C. D. were wedged in close to him, and the three of them could talk. They established that they were all safe and healthy for the moment, and then said nothing for a long time.

Danny's troll said, "We make-a stew."

Gilly's troll, by far the dimmer of the two, said, "We play with 'em first. Pull off arms and legs."

"No play. They run away. Make-a stew."

Angrily, Gilly's troll said, "Play first."

Danny's troll said nothing for a while, and Danny thought perhaps the dim bulb had won the argument. Then Danny's troll said, "No play. But you can peel 'em first."

"Peel 'em," Gilly's troll said happily. He said "Peel 'em" over and over again in a singsong, and bounced as he walked.

Danny tried not to listen while they discussed the various merits of boiling their captives whole or of peeling them first. In his mind, Danny voted for a long period of fattening up before doing either, but he didn't think the trolls would be interested.

Gilly cried out, "Do anything you want with us, but please, please don't throw us into Gojumpintheh Lake!"

The trolls paid no attention. They continued their argument, neither troll making much headway with the other.

Gilly said, "That Gojumpintheh Lake is terrible! It's cold and wet! Please don't throw us in there!"

Danny suspected what Gilly was doing. He'd read the Uncle Remus stories too, and he knew about Br'er Rabbit and the briar patch. Under other circumstances Br'er Rabbit's trick might work, but Danny was not certain the trolls were intelligent enough to take the bait Gilly was offering.

Gilly went on about what a terrible place Gojumpintheh Lake was, and eventually the trolls stopped to listen. "Please," Gilly cried in a pitiful voice. "Boil us, peel us, do anything you like, but please don't throw us into Gojumpintheh Lake."

"Gojumpintheh Lake," Danny's troll muttered.

"Yeah," said the other troll.

"We throw 'em. Make fun while they drown."

"Then eat 'em," Gilly's troll said and smacked his lips.

"Then eat 'em," Danny's troll agreed.

"No, please!" Danny cried. The others chimed in.

"Gojumpintheh Lake," Danny's troll hollered triumphantly and shook his three captives in the air. Danny was glad he hadn't eaten much dinner.

Gilly and Danny and the others kept up their pleading all the way to the lake. Danny, at any rate, had no idea what a troll's memory was like and he didn't want them to forget where they were going.

The trolls emerged from the trees and stood on the pebble-covered bank of Gojumpintheh Lake. In the starshine the water was luminous. "Don't throw us in there," Ryan shouted. "We'll drown!"

"Heh heh," the trolls said. "Drown 'em an' eat 'em." They pitched the kids at the water.

"Aaiiee!" Danny cried as he hurtled through the air with the wind tearing at him. He had an impression of black sky and trees and of the trolls laughing behind him, and then his universe was wet and stinging cold. He fell through the water for what seemed to be a long time, then he kicked toward the light.

When he broke the surface he thrashed around until he saw the trolls. They were dancing around and singing to themselves about drowning 'em and eating 'em.

The kids came up one at a time, spouting and shaking their heads, all but Gilly.

"She's probably down there playing tag with a trout or something," Ryan said.

"I hope she has a plan," said Elisa. "Here come the trolls."

The trolls shouted and waved their clubs as they waded into the water. The kids rode up and down on the swell they caused.

Gilly popped to the surface with her arms dramatically outspread and sang, " 'Come along and visit me, at the bottom of the sea . . .' "

"Perhaps some other time, Gilly," C. D. said. "The trolls approach."

Gilly said, "Right," and began to sing one of her mermaid songs. A wave rose from nowhere, building as it rolled toward them until it seemed that any second it would topple over. "Don't fight it," Gilly cried as the wave picked them up and pushed them across the lake.

"Wow," Ryan shouted and gave a Tarzan yell.

This is great, Danny thought. He shouted too. They all did, even Frankie, who did not shout in excitement very often. Outside a boat, Danny had never moved so fast on water. When he saw where they were heading, Danny shouted, "Whoa!" and tried to slow down by paddling backwards. They were about to crash into the dock where Ulysses and Jason's galley was moored.

The wave didn't stop and Danny braced himself for the collision. But it never came. The wave lifted him out of the lake and deposited him gently on the dock. The others sat near him in puddles, wet but unharmed. Gilly stood up and sang a song of leave-taking. The top of the wave nodded at her and then rolled away, melting until it was just one more ripple on the lake.

Gilly hummed as they walked slowly up the wide path to Camp Horrorific, and soon their clothes were dry. It had been a long, exciting night.

The kids heard a rustle in the forest. "Trolls," C. D. cried and leaped into the air as a bat. The rest of them backed into the forest on the opposite side of the path, their eyes big and frightened. Something caused the tall grass to part and a moment later, Gnorble and Andahseven stood in the middle of the path lowering their hoods.

"It's only us," Andahseven said.

Frankie walked onto the path and said, "You can get a little too clever with those hoods."

"Indeed," said Elisa as she joined him. "You might give us a hullo! before you frighten us."

"Sorry," said Gnorble, looking at the ground as if he meant it. He smiled hopefully and went on, "But that was elf-like cleverness the way you escaped from the trolls."

"Thanks," said Gilly.

After an uncomfortable silence, Gnorble said, "We didn't mean to abandon you."

"You didn't do it on purpose," Ryan said.

"No," said Gnorble, "but we did do it."

C. D. descended on them, giving the dwarfs quite a start. With a flourish, he pulled his Thermos of Fluid of Life from the pocket in his cape. "I am sorry to frighten you," C. D. said around his straw.

"That's all right," said Gnorble. "I guess we had it coming."

"We feel bad," Andahseven added.

Gnorble pursed his lips and looked at the top of a

tree. False dawn had broken and made the sky look almost white. The silhouettes of trees stood out against it.

Uncomfortably, Gnorble said, "We could go back to the troll cave again and get your stuff."

Danny shivered at the thought. He could tell the rest of the kids didn't think much of the idea either.

"We feel bound to ask," Andahseven said.

So not even the dwarfs wanted to go. Maybe they had been silly even to go once, risking their lives for a bag of marbles, a few bucks in change, and some plastic sunglasses. Danny was sorry about the locket, but even that wasn't worth going back for.

"Well," said Gnorble, "we can escort you back to camp anyway. Just in case."

Elisa, always the most gracious one, said, "We would be delighted."

They walked up the path as the world brightened and birds began to sing. Trees lightened from black to green and broken rays of sunlight shot between them like spears. The air became warm and the kids took off their jackets.

A dark smudge that Danny didn't remember crossed the path ahead. None of them knew what it was, but as they got closer, it took on the form of a gigantic piece of steel wool.

They stopped when they could go no farther. The piece of steel wool could now be seen to be a tangled mass of thorny bushes. It was taller than C. D.'s father—who was the tallest person Danny knew—and formed a wall that blocked their way. Hard twisted branches of the wall were so thick, neither the kids nor the dwarfs could see the camp on the other side.

Chapter Nine

Wonderful Lawn Jockeys

"What is it?" said Ryan.

Gnorble said, "It is a curse to discourage anyone from entering the camp."

"Works for me," Danny said.

"Trolls again?" asked C. D.

Frankie said, "The trolls do not seem capable of speaking complete sentences, let alone curses."

"True enough," Gnorble said. "But they have nasty relatives who are much smarter than they are. Curses would not be beyond them."

Andahseven nodded. "Lords of the goblins. They live deep underground, even deeper than dwarfs, and they never emerge. Even moonlight and starshine are too bright for them."

They contemplated the thicket for a moment and then Elisa said, "I read about curses such as this in a story called 'Sleeping Beauty.' "

"That's great," Gilly said. "We know what this

is and who had the problem before. The questions is: What do we do about it?''

''I don't think buying a vowel will help,'' Ryan said.

''Not unless a vowel is some kind of sword,'' Gnorble said. He pulled his own short sword from its scabbard as he stepped forward. He and Andahseven began to hack at the thicket, causing thorns and bits of knotty branches to fly.

The branches must have been as tough as iron because it was a long time before the dwarfs made any headway. Eventually they were able to open a narrow passage. Even while the kids watched, the branches rustled as the hole slowly grew together.

''Hurry,'' Gnorble said.

They all rushed through. Thorns brushed against Danny like pointy fingers. He and the others stopped on the other side of the wall to see what damage had been done. Frankie had been scratched and Gilly had some snags in her shirt, but otherwise they'd gotten through without injury. The opening closed as if it had never existed.

Camp Horrorific was quiet. At this hour kids should have been running to the bathroom cabin and back, and smoke should have been rising from Zelda Bella's fireplace in the mess cabin. None of this was happening.

''It looks dead,'' Ryan said.

C. D. looked at him with surprise and said, ''Is that bad?''

The dwarfs stared at each other. Gnorble said, ''What does he mean, 'Is that bad?'?''

''His people are vampires,'' said Danny.

"Ah," said Andahseven, nodding. "Old and respected folk," Gnorble said.

"Come on," said Gilly. "We can discuss pedigrees later." She marched down into camp.

They began their exploration with the mess cabin. Even if nobody else was awake, Zelda Bella should have been up and doing. But nothing was happening in the kitchen. Pots and pans were clean and neatly put away, just as Zelda Bella had left them the night before. The door to Zelda Bella's private room was closed.

"Zelda Bella," Gilly called. She knocked on the door. There was no answer and Gilly tried again. Still nothing. "I say we just barge in."

Elisa nodded. "It is an emergency. We have no choice."

Gilly slowly opened the door and looked around it. She swung the door open wide and everybody could see Zelda Bella was lying in bed on her back under a patchwork comforter that rose and fell with her gentle snoring.

"She sounds like a troll," Gilly said.

"Don't even say that for a joke," Danny said.

"Right. Sorry."

They all went into the room. Danny felt a little nervous about this. When he was much younger he had occasionally awakened his parents in the middle of the night, but this was different. Zelda Bella's room wasn't part of his house. And Zelda Bella wasn't his mother.

They tried to awaken her, first with gentle pokes, and then with shakes, and finally with shouts. Nothing worked.

"It's the curse," Andahseven said, and Gnorble agreed.

" 'Sleeping Beauty,' " Elisa said again.

"But why?" Ryan said. "What's in it for the trolls if everybody is asleep?"

Gnorble considered that for a moment and then said, "Maybe they think if they close the camp off with a thicket and put everybody to sleep, nobody will go in or out, and this will discourage other people from coming out here."

"Never work," Danny said. "If a whole camp full of people disappeared all of a sudden, a lot of folks would come out here. The rangers for a start. And then the state police. And after a while, maybe even the national guard. Crowds of folks."

Ryan said, "We already know the trolls aren't too bright."

Camp Horrorific contained only eight cabins—the four sleeping cabins, two bathroom cabins, one mess cabin, and one administration cabin. The kids and dwarfs spread out and checked each of them. Not much later they gathered at the campfire pit to compare notes. Everybody in camp—which meant everybody except them—was asleep and could not be awakened.

"That is not all," Frankie said. "You should see what I found." Without waiting for an answer, he went into the administration cabin. The kids and dwarfs followed him through the office and into J. Manley Forest's private study.

Danny expected to find Mr. Forest asleep in his chair, but no one was there. Signed photographs of old serial heroes and villains hung on the wall. A

plastic spaceship designed like a cigar lay in a launch cradle on one corner of the desk. Nearby was a stack of new magazines and paperback novels. The whole place smelled of troll.

Danny walked around the room looking for clues while Frankie pointed to a magazine lying in the middle of the floor. It was the July 1932 issue of *Pretty Good Wonder Tales*.

"That's not like Mr. Forest at all," Gilly said.

"Indeed not," said Elisa. "He would not leave a magazine on the floor without a plastic bag around it."

"He would not leave a magazine on the floor at all," Frankie said.

"Here's something else," Danny said. Everybody gathered around the window. The screen had a hole in it that was big enough for Mr. Forest to fit through. Snagged on the broken screen was a tuft of coarse dirty hair.

"My guess," said Ryan, "is that if we look outside we'll find troll footprints."

Gilly looked outside. "Right," she said. "Also, a shoe that has to belong to Mr. Forest. Only he wears those two-tone oxfords."

C. D. said, "We can assume that the abduction of Mr. Forest is connected with the curse on the camp."

"I'll go for that," Gilly said.

"But how are they connected?" said Ryan.

Elisa considered for a minute. "If we think of Mr. Forest as Sleeping Beauty," she said, "then all we have to do is find him and awaken him, and the curse should be lifted."

Andahseven was sitting in Mr. Forest's chair

swinging his legs and flipping through a magazine that had an alien landscape on the cover. Gnorble hit him in the shoulder. Andahseven put down the magazine and said, "That's how things work."

"All right, then," said Elisa, as she picked up the issue of *Pretty Good Wonder Tales* and slipped it into a plastic bag.

"Away we go!" said Gilly.

They decided that Mr. Forest could have been taken to only one place. "The troll cave in the ravine," C. D. said.

"Right," Frankie agreed.

They followed the troll footprints for a while, and the trail confirmed their suspicions. Gnorble said, "I know a shortcut to the ravine."

"I'm game," said Danny.

They had been walking through easy country, but Gnorble and Andahseven lead them across streams, through fields of bushes, and among trees with low-growing branches.

C. D. said, "We should know never to take a shortcut."

Elisa said, "Yes. Mr. Forest will be pleased I thought to encase the magazine in plastic before coming."

This adventure had been particularly difficult for C. D., Danny thought. He normally took a vampire's care with his grooming, but his fancy green tuxedo was grass stained, waterlogged, and bristly with stickers that had caught in his cuffs. Danny was impressed that he hadn't complained.

They came to a groove in the earth. As they walked

along it, the walls became higher, and soon they were walking along the bottom of a ravine. "*The* ravine," Andahseven assured them.

Gnorble stopped, looked around, and said, "We must climb here." He started up the rocky wall. Danny and the others followed. If he took care, the climbing was easy because of all the boulders and rocks. He had plenty of things to stand on and grab for support. Eventually they came to the sandy area in front of the troll cave. With a here-we-go attitude, they plunged inside.

The entryway was sunny, but around the corner, the cave was dark. "Sounds like pigs fighting," Gilly said. The kids turned on their flashlights, which, along with the firefly lanterns, filled the place with light and dancing shadows.

Mr. Forest had been stashed atop a mound of bottle caps where he was snoring loudly. It was the echoing snores that made the sounds Gilly had described as they entered.

Ryan picked up a bottle cap and said, "What's Moxie?"

"I think my grandfather used to drink that stuff when he was a kid," Danny said wonderingly.

They tried to awaken Mr. Forest using normal means, but they could not do it. "I'm not surprised," Gnorble said. "You can't just break a curse with a nod and a wink."

Andahseven was about to disagree with Gnorble, but Gnorble shut him down with a strong look.

Back among the gravelly remains of the troll statue they found the live trolls making little bird sounds as they slept. The kids and the dwarfs listened to them

WONDER

for a while with amazement. Ryan whispered, "They actually make less noise when they're asleep."

"Let's wake up Mr. Forest and get out of here," Danny said.

They walked back to where Mr. Forest was sleeping and studied him. Elisa said, " 'Sleeping Beauty' " says that the princess was awakened by love's first kiss."

"Any volunteers for kissing Mr. Forest?" Ryan asked.

"Not I," said Gilly.

"Me also," said Elisa.

"So much for brave sacrifices," C. D. said. "What is next?'

"I have this magazine," Elisa said as she pulled it from the bag.

"What will that do?" Andahseven asked.

"I understand," Frankie said admiringly. "Mr. Forest has shown that he has a love for the smell of old pulp magazines. Surely you will flip the pages of the magazine under his nose."

"What about the troll musk?" Gilly said.

"We must take our chances," Elisa said.

Danny could only agree with her. "Spread out," he said, and backed away as if he were one of the Three Stooges.

They all did the same. When Andahseven took a step back, he tripped on a precariously balanced pile of bicycles and started an avalanche that he could not stop. The crashing and banging went on for a long time, seconds at least, and the trolls awoke with a roar. They picked up their clubs and stalked toward Elisa.

"Distract them," Frankie cried. "Gilly and I will turn them to stone."

"We will?" Gilly said. Frankie went over and huddled with her. Immediately she began nodding.

C. D. ran to a pile of key chains and began stuffing them into his pockets. "I love these," he said. "I will steal them." The trolls looked at C. D., uncertain whether his threat was more important than Frankie and Gilly's.

Danny cried, "Foil gum wrappers! Boy, I need some of these." He stuffed them into his pockets. Ryan and Elisa did the same with red bicycle reflectors and ballpoint pens.

While C. D., Danny, Ryan, and Elisa moved from pile to pile, forcing the trolls to follow them but never letting them get close enough to do damage, Frankie and Gilly worked behind the trolls' backs. Into the angle of the entryway they moved the mirror Danny had used to frighten the trolls. A faint glow from outside was reflected from the mirror into the main cave. This got the trolls' attention.

"I love these TV dinner trays," Danny said as he desperately shoved them down his shirt front.

"Glass beads are my thing!" Ryan cried.

The trolls looked at them, uncertain what to do.

Gilly began to sing. Like some big clean banana slug, the water climbed out of its pool and crawled toward where Frankie was waiting at the entrance to the main cave. Gilly sang a complicated melody and the water leaped into the air. It spread itself thin across the cave opening like some wet spiderweb and held onto the walls

"Thicker in the center," Frankie said.

Gilly changed her tune and the water became thicker in the center.

"More, more, more," said Frankie.

Gilly continued to sing.

Under Frankie's direction, Gilly eventually got the song right and the water was perfect. The sun that came into the entryway was reflected off the mirror and focused into a single bright beam by the water lens. The trolls saw Frankie and Gilly and ran toward them, obviously hoping to brain them with their clubs and shut off the sunlight. But Gilly sang little trills and arpeggios and aimed the sunlight at them. It struck a troll and turned him to stone. As dumb as the other one was, he now saw that the thing to do was hide. He retreated into the back of the cave, but not fast enough. Gilly got him and turned him to stone too. The resulting statue looked a lot like an ancient Greek sports figure.

The kids and the dwarfs gathered around the stone trolls and admired them. "Very nice," Gnorble said. "What did you do?"

"We used science," Frankie said. "Gilly and I made a lens from water and focused the sunlight where we wanted it, just as beads of dew focus sunlight on leaves and make tiny holes that some people call fairy footprints."

"They aren't fairy footprints?" Gnorble asked.

"I guess we have to go now," Gnorble said.

"Unless you want Mr. Forest to see you," Gilly said.

"That would not be a good idea. Come on, Andahseven."

They shook hands all around, and Andahseven hugged Gilly. She said, "It's not like we're leaving the area. We'll be at Camp Horrorific for another few weeks."

Gnorble marched out of the cave, but Andahseven glanced back many times before he left.

After that it was a simple matter to awaken Mr. Forest with the smell of old pulp paper. He looked around and said, "Where am I?"

"A troll cave?" Danny asked experimentally.

Mr. Forest nodded and said, "Ya know, I'll bet that somebody has been saving all this stuff to cash in on the antique market."

"Trolls?" Elisa asked.

"No, no, not trolls. Trolls don't exist. Though I see the collector has found some very nice statues of what could be trolls. Make great lawn jockeys."

"For very big lawns," Frankie said.

"And look at this!" Mr. Forest went on. He took the issue of *Pretty Good Wonder Tales* from Elisa and said, "Here's a magazine just like mine. That's a pretty good wonder tale in itself!"

"What about the rightful owner?" C. D. said.

"Look," said Mr. Forest, "I'll leave a note asking the rightful owner to contact me." He pulled a pad of paper from a pocket and scribbled something on the top sheet. He tore it off and set it down, weighted carefully with the end of an automobile bumper. "If he doesn't contact me by the end of the summer, I guess the place is mine." The thought pleased him.

On the long walk back to Camp Horrorific, Mr. Forest talked about the killing he would make in the boom antique market. "You know what a Moxie cap

is worth?'' he asked excitedly and did not wait for them to answer.

When they got back to Camp Horrorific, the thorn thicket was gone and everybody was awake. Nobody remembered anything about a curse, though they all commented on how surprised they were they'd overslept.

The next evening Frankie put out more troll motels. The morning after that he went out to check on them and found nothing. Everybody but him was willing to believe that meant no more trolls were around. But he said, ''We may catch one tomorrow. Or maybe the next night.''

''I believe you *want* to catch one,'' Elisa said.

''A troll statue would make a fine lawn jockey at the Stein mansion, would it not?''

Elisa had to agree that it would.

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